No. 104

# The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

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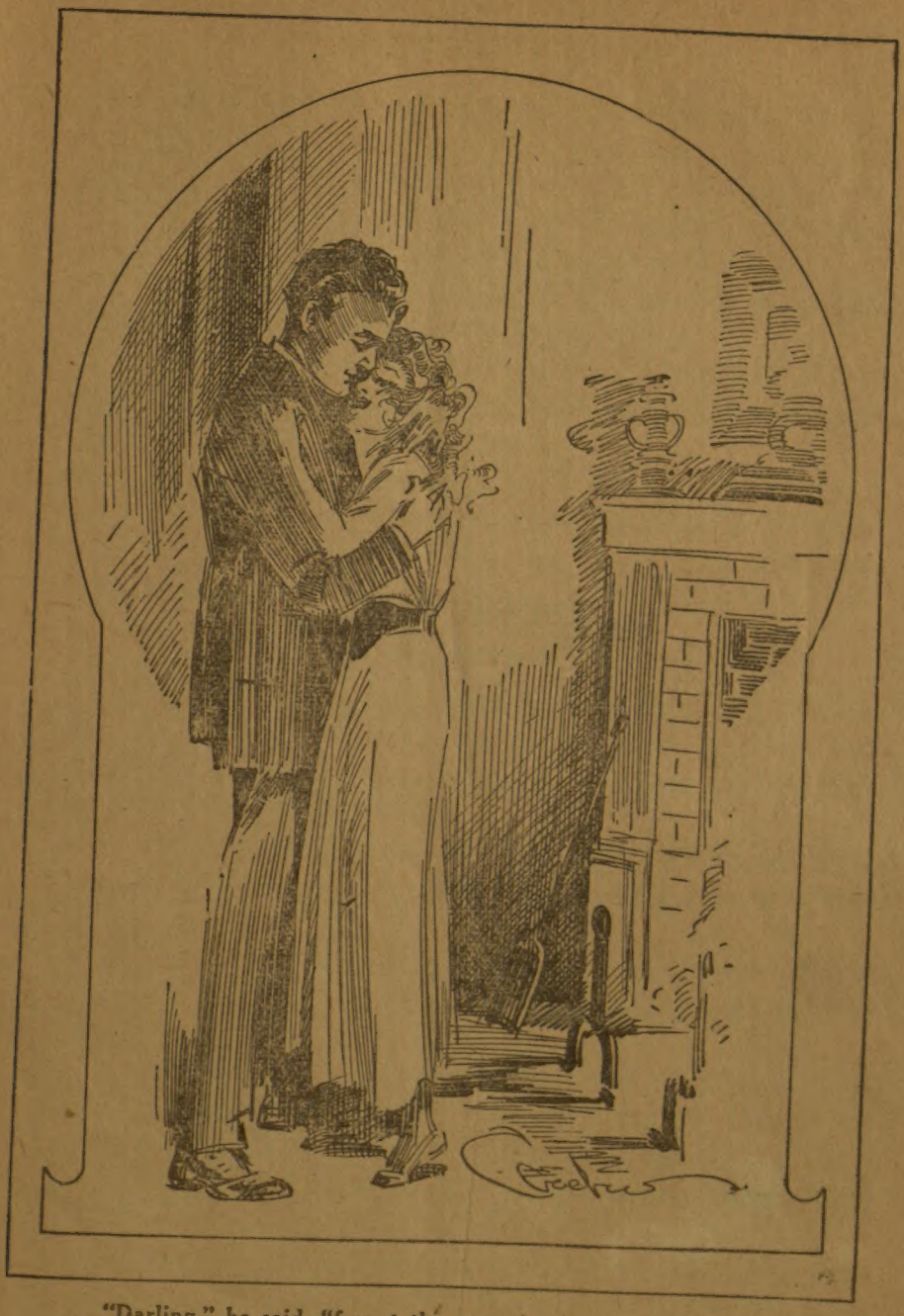

"Darling," he said, "forget the past, for from to-night it shall be forever a hidden depth over which our lives shall stretch to happiness."

R. of M. G., No. 104.

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GERALD could scarcely believe that Morris Hope would divulge the secret of murdering his wife to his sister Rosalind. But as he continued to question her, he became more convinced and surprised that such was the case.

"Rosalind, are you mad, to continue to go to that house after what has been told you?"

"No, I am quite sane, and sure of myself, for, in spite of that secret which is shared by you, I shall pass the rest of my life with Morris."

"By Heaven, you shall not!"

"You cannot prevent it, for I am his wife already."

Gerald staggered back as though he had been shot; his face was ghastly, his eyes wild. Crushed and horrified, he sank into a seat.

"This cannot be true; it is too awful!"

Rosalind had expected a scene, but not of this sort; the intense horror of his looks chilled her. She almost cried out with fear as he rose to his feet like a man in a dream, saying slowly:

"If this be true, he has wrecked three lives, brought dishonor on a spotless name, and misery to two happy homes."

"What do you mean, Gerald? Listen! No shame can come to me through him worse than he has already made me feel."

"Hush! I cannot listen now. Unfortunate woman, how you have been befooled! And to think that I have helped to bring you to this—I whom your father trusted to guard your future. Blind, selfish wretch that I am, I can but pity you now, dear."

"Gerald, hear me! Suppose Morris did shoot that unhappy girl, you know that it was done under the maddening influence of jealousy.

"And if you, who loved her so, could forgive him,

why should not I, who loved him as never yet man was loved by woman? To be always with him, and teach him to live a higher, nobler life is my one aim. Remorse has almost killed him already; but there is the life of a soul to save, and you would snatch that chance from him. Oh, Gerald, how can you look so cold?"

"You do not understand, Rosalind, that if you live with this man you may have children, spotless little souls, that will suffer for the sins of their father."

"If there were, there is a just God who will care for them. They need never know of their father's sin if you keep our counsel."

"Ah! But then there is the mother's shame."

"Gerald, I cannot see how the momentary madness that led to such dire results can compromise me. Tell me what you mean."

"I cannot—at least, not yet. Promise me that you will not see or speak to that man for another week, and I will do my best to help you out of this net that promises to drag you down to dishonor. Will you promise?"

"Yes, if you do not intend harm to my husband."

Gerald shivered at the last word, then bowed as though accepting her promise, and went to his own room.

Next morning the guests arrived. Neither brother nor sister was in the mood to entertain company, but both showed their self-control and high breeding by disguising their depression and making at least the womenfolk fancy they had not a care in the world.

Mrs. Langley was looking so bright and handsome that Rosalind wondered Selwyn Howard had so long withstood her witchery.

So full of mirth and jollity was the merry widow that the others could not be dull, and once or twice Selwyn found himself thinking she was wonderfully alluring, though she did do her best to attract him; but

what does man not forgive a woman who tries to fascinate him, if she be but handsome and amiable.

That evening when the ladies had retired to the drawing-room after dinner, Gerald told Selwyn he had something to confide to him. Selwyn lit a fresh cigar, poured out a bumper of wine, and prepared to listen.

Gerald was not in his usual form, he seemed so dreadfully upset and shaken. Twice he tried to speak, but could not for emotion. Selwyn poured him out some wine, and said:

"Come, old fellow, this won't do, you know. You must control yourself, or you cannot control fortune. What has happened?"

"The worst that could happen. Morris Hope has already married my sister, curse him!"

"By all means, I am with you there. But why are you so upset because he married her? I knew it long ago, and my idea has been to indict him for bigamy. But those women are so soft-hearted, there is no getting them to punish a man by the law."

Gerald looked puzzled, and knocked a wineglass over in his earnestness as he leaned towards the other, and in a hurried, anxious voice, said:

"I do not understand. You say you have known of my sister's marriage a long time. How can that be, when it could not have taken place but quite recently?"

"My dear fellow, you have not been told the whole of the facts Hope married your sister under the name of Morris while she was still at school, and subsequently told her that the marriage was void because she was under age and he had not used his full name.

"So little do most men know of the laws which govern them that he believed this, and as belief is contagious, she caught the same idea, and when he deserted her went to her father and told him all.

"Your father, glad to catch at the chance of freeing her, seeing this fellow was a villain, sent for him and got him to resign all claim to her for a sum of money which he needed to buy a share in old Clyde's bank, where he was a clerk and afterwards rose to be manage and partner.

"When the old man died he sold out, as you know, and took to a new line of business, that of guardian to a lovely young heiress, whom by some evil chance he managed to marry and worry to death in a very short time. Why, man alive, what's the matter? You are surely not going to faint?"

The women summoned by his impatient peal of the bell, came in, scared to see Gerald stretched senseless on the couch, and Selwyn soaking him with wine instead of water.

He soon opened his eyes in a shamefaced way, saying he supposed he was out of sorts. But he did not look it; his cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkling with intense excitement, and he seemed in the wildest spirits.

"I think you have taken leave of your senses to-night, my boy," said Selwyn Howard.

"I think I really have. I feel so extraordinary happy! Why should I not?"

Rosalind looked amazed. What possessed Gerald? She marvelled. She wondered still more when she met him quite early the folowing morning coming along the road that led from Wembley, looking as joyous as a boy, whistling some merry tune, and showing by his springy, buoyant strides that the mirth of the night before had not gone off yet.

"Rosalind," he said, putting his hands on her shoulders, "is it true you married before father died?"

"Yes, of course—years before. Don't you remember when I ran away from school?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was then."

She smiled to see him toss his cap into the air and hear him shout "Hurrah!" Then he tucked her hand under his arm, and led her in to breakfast.

Meanwhile, Morris Hope had recovered both health and brain-power, but he was heart-sick with a dreadful depression.

Remorse was busy recalling his wretched past. All Rosalind's love and courage could not inspire him with a hope of happiness now that his eyes were fully open to see the sin he had committed in al its glaring deformity.

He felt he dare not take Rosalind back as a wife, though they had arranged to spend their future together, lest one day children should be born to them, and perhaps know their father to be a murderer.

The curse of Cain was upon him. He could not stretch out his blood-stained hands to take the blessing of a noble love like Rosalind's.

The house, too, seemed like a tomb—so silent and devoid of life since she was prevented from brightening it with her presence; and when one evening, in the gloaming, he walked in the garden, the memory of that miserable night when Dora fell by his hand became so clear to him that he dared not glance towards the darkened window lest he should see the wraith of the girl who had looked out upon this same dismal old garden, and thought it Paradise because it had once screened her happy meetings with the man she loved.

So much did he dread seeing her at the window, that when at last he forced himself to look in that direction he shuddered to see a light burning there.

Amy, knowing he was out in the dusk, had lit the gas, and when he saw her shadow moving in the room—

long, lank and ungraceful—so busy was his brain with that other fairer image that he confused the two, and stood rooted to the spot with stony horror, till the shape wavered, grew more shadowy and uncertain, and finally died out, leaving only his miserable memory to fill the blank.

So shaken was he by his own imagination that he still gazed on, his heart beating with dull, heavy thuds that echoed in his brain, making him feel sick and giddy. He drew his cold hand across his forehead, and pressed his burning eyes to shut out the sight his imagination conjured up.

While doing this, he heard a knock at the outer door, and, thinking it was Rosalind, he braced up nerve enough to go to the French window, bu it was fastened inside.

Just as he was about to retrace his steps, all the blood in his veins curdled with unutterable horror, for the door facing the window swung back, and a woman entered the room with wild, frightened looks. Her veil as thrown back, exposing the pure pale face of Dora Clyde.

Someone was coming in behind her, but he had no eyes for any but that never-forgotten face, which had haunted him, sleeping and waking ever since that dreadful night when, in his madness, he had shot down the woman he then so passionately loved.

What anguish he endured during those few seconds while he stood there at the window he never forgot to his dying day.

Reason reeled, and his heart seemed to die. With a prayer to Heaven to release him from his agony, he tottered and clung to the iron rail with an audible groan of misery.

Was he never to be let alone? Must he be forever

tortured and tormented with that face of his dead wife? His heart breathed out in that prayer and its groan of misery with indeed pathetic to the listeners.

## Chapter 341

## FORGIVEN

SOMEONE sprang forward at the sound, drew back the bolts, and dragged him into the room, where he sank on the couch that had once been wet with Dora's blood, huddled down among the cushions, shutting out the sight of that lovely, haunting face, whose dark pathetic eyes had reproached him unceasingly all the weary time he had believed himself a murderer.

He dared not lift his eyes, though he heard the confused sound of voices mingled in reproachful speech.

Someone slipped a soft strong hand in his and pressed it, saying:

"This melodramatic surprise was cruelly conceived, and has been brutally carried out. I thought I should have been in time to prevent it, or at least, to have prepared him for it. For months he has been suffering from a severe illness that has shattered his nerves, dissipated his strength, and borne down his courage, or he would not have met you thus, for he was never a coward."

It was Rosalind's proud, unfaltering voice that spoke; it was Rosalind who bade him look up and try to understand the relief that the explanation of this scene would give him.

The pressure of her hand seemed to inspire him with some of her courage, for he raised his head and looked into her reassuring eyes.

Then Gerald Halcombe stepped in front of the shrinking Dora, who had crouched upon a seat and hid-

den her lovely, frightened face in her hands. Selwyn Howard laid his hand upon her shoulder and begged her to be calm.

Jane, erect, and menacing all with her fierce looks, kept guard over her darling, while Amy glanced anxiously from one face to another, trying to read something that might unravel the mystery of this raid upon her brother's house, and seeing that all looked darkly upon him—all but Rosalind and Dora—she crossed to his side with sullen dignity, facing those she deemed antagonistis to him.

For a moment there was silence, broken only by a woman's sobs. Gerald looked down upon Dora's timid, shrinking figure, then said, in his firm, ringing voice:

"Morris Hope, I crave your pardon for intruding upon you thus, but when you have heard all I have to tell, you will forget to do anything but thank God for delivering your soul from the weight of a hidden crime. Look up, man, and see here the woman you thought you had killed in your jealous rage. See, she is alive, and, thank Heaven, now well."

Dora looked with a grateful smile into the face she loved.

She dared not confront that other yet, he who had darkened her life by his cruel love. Morris tried to speak, but could not. His parched lips parted, yet no sound came from them, but his burning eyes entreated Gerald to hasten on.

"When I took Dora home that awful night, after I found her lying wounded in this very room, I had no hope of saving her; but God was with me and aided my poor skill to preserve the life I loved.

"Jane helped me, and with a woman's cunning was the first to suggest that though our darling lived, she should be dead to you, who, by your cruel conduct, had

forfeited your right to her.

"After the tragedy, when you saw Dora, I had little hope of saving her, and she, poor child, fully believed herself to be dying.

"After that I succeeded in extracting the bullet; it was while she was still under the effects of the opiate administered to her to help the operation that you saw her as you supposed dead.

"It was easy to deceive you, so shattered were you by the horror of your own sin. The funeral was easily arranged so as to further deceive you, for your brain had already ceased to assert its observant power; the woman who lies buried in the grave that you supposed contained Dora was my cook, who died just before I took Dora home, and would have been buried by the parish had I not defrayed the expenses. When all this was settled I smuggled Dora away at night with Jane, and took her to the South of France.

"She was very ill, so ill that we feared she would be taken from us after all; but with unceasing care we kept her with us, and then, when her baby was born, she took a turn for the better."

When her brother mentioned the birth of a child, Rosalind's face took a deathly tinge, her lips quivered, and she withdrew her hand from her husband's hold.

A jealous envy of the young mother shook her heart with a wicked storm. Her voice sounded hoarse and strange as she asked—

"What of that child?"

"The poor little crushed flower blossoms out afresh in heaven. Its sweetness was not lent us long," returned Jane, sadly.

"Thank God for that!" said Rosalind, the fire dying out of her eyes as she saw her brother take Dora's sob-shaken little figure in his arms, and hold it to his

heart as he went on, in a softened tone:

"You all know me here, so I think my life has been honorable enough to warrant your belief in my words when I say that, believing Dora still the wife of Morris Hope, I respected her in all things as though she were my own sister.

"Her life, poor little sweetheart, was sad enough without any fresh trouble of my making. She was terribly grieved about her baby's loss, though she knows now that it was out of loving compassion that it was taken.

"Well, when I returned to England she did not like to be left behind. She always had a dread of her husband claiming her. So I put her in a little cottage at Harrow, always pretending that her maintenance was arranged for between her husband and myself.

"She often wondered — innocent little love—that he had so readily given her up, but she had no idea we had made him believe she had died. Her tender womanly compassion for his remorse would have frustrated all our plans had she known he was still left to suffer under such a sense of sin.

"Directly she heard about it, and that previous marriage with my sister, she insisted upon coming here to beg his forgiveness for the deception. Her tender heart had long ceased to feel resentment towards the man who had caused her so much misery, yet now I believe she is glad to know that she is free."

As Gerald Halcombe finished, Dora raised her head, and stepping towards the group on the couch said, in her sweet, unsteady voice:

"Yes, I am glad to be free from a loveless union, glad to restore another to her rightful place. True, I feel the shame and dishonor that I have incurred by the mockery of marriage that I entered into innocently. Yet

I can fully forgive the past, and hope you both may have more happiness in your future. Morris, can you forgive me as freely for the misery I caused you so long to suffer in imagining yourself a murderer?"

Rosalind motioned Morris to take the little shaking hand held out to him, but he seemed, blind, bewildered.

A look of fear darkened her face as she said, fiercely:

"Your folly in causing him this fright has brought the old illness back upon him. Morris, my husband, my darling, speak to me; I am so grieved for you. We may be happy yet—oh, so happy; only try to keep well for my sake."

She took the ghastly face and hid it on her breast, wooing him with sweet, womanly words of endearment and sympathy. There was a dead silence in the room; the men looked uncomfortable, especially Selwyn, who presently stammered lamely enough—

"Miss Halcombe, I wish you would allow me to arrange this business for you."

"Miss Halcombe is not my name now, sir," Rosalind retorted, "and I can entrust any business I have to my husband."

"Is it possible, my dear madam, that you intend to take up the duties of wifehood with that man again after all the trouble he has caused you? It were easy to free you from him if you would only let me work for you."

"Mr. Howard, you were my father's friend, and therefore should respect his child. I see but one duty directed by Heaven—to love, honor, and obey my husband. I took him for better or worse; the worse is past, the better to come. Respect our sorrow, and leave our future to God and ourselves. Morris has sinned but who

has not? My love is large enough to forgive him were he to sin 'seventy times seven.' My husband, look up and tell them that you welcome back the wife of your youth."

Morris staggered to his feet, holding on to Rosalind's shoulder, and looking towards Dora, said, in a very strange, far-off voice—

"You asked my forgiveness — mine! Oh, God! Why did not your mercy kill me? Child it is you who should forgive—you, and you alone.

"Rosalind, my brave, loyal wife, I thank you for your trust, your love, your patience. If a life devoted to repaying all the debt I owe you can be worth acceptance, take it; I love you with all the strength and gratitude of my soul. You shall guide me now. There is life and love before us; we will go far away and be forgotten by all who have complaint against us.

"Dora's fortune remains untouched, and untouched I restore it, trusting Heaven may be as compassionate to me as she whom I wronged so cruelly, she who has humbled herself to ask for pardon for the just punishment that has made me nearer being a good man than I ever was before."

Here he burst into uncontrollable weeping, sobbing out his relief, his joy, his pain, on his wife's faithful bosom. Amy looked on stolidly for a moment or two, then knelt and kissed his hand. He took his wife's hand and placed it in his sister's, saying in a broken voice—

"Let her understand, wife, that we three will be together always."

And Rosalind kissed the mute lips, and made her understand. Then Dora pulled down her lover's proud head and whispered that he was to wish them God-speed for both herself and him, which he did right heartily.

Selwyn Howard followed his example, and then added—

"I suppose, as Gerald means to become a benedict, I shall have to follow suit, if only to keep some other man from stealing my mother's companion. I must try someone at once. Come, Jane, be proxy."

Dora laughed to see her old nurse's starchy bonnet disarranged by the lawyer's caress, then crept to Gerald's side, saying a little sadly—

"Are you sure, sweetheart, you will never regret taking me out of dishonor to the happiness of wifehood with you?"

He drew her to his longing arms.

"Darling," he said, "forget the past, for from tonight it shall be for ever a hidden depth over which our lives shall stretch to happiness."

Morris Hope and Rosalind went abroad, but after a few years they returned. It was then that Mrs. Hope and Marjorie Ericsen became such close friends. For both of these women had suffered because of the man they finally won—"To Have and to Hold."

Gerald Halcombe and Dora were married and were very happy. Selwyn Howard also joined the ranks of the benedicts and so this story comes to a fitting close —for "All is well that ends well."

"You and I are not suited to each other, my dear girl," he went on mercilessly. "We have both tried to make the best of a bad bargain. Isn't that true, Helen?"

# The Great Awakening

By HELEN GLYN KINGSLEY

## CHAPTER 1

## *THE ETERNAL TRIANGLE*

ALTHOUGH it was past nine o'clock, the corridors in one of Chicago's most exclusive apartment hotels were hushed. On the side facing Lake Michigan the curtain of every window was tightly drawn to keep out the disturbing rays of a beautiful Spring morning sun. To be able to live in this hotel was considered a badge of wealth. It was the permanent home of the idle rich who sought refuge there because it solved the many annoying problems common in an aristocratic house where a full retinue of servants is deemed indispensable.

So far as was generally known the most respectable people only gained admittance to this hotel. But upon one or two occasions it seemed that the management had been a trifle lax in making inquiries as to the moral character and social standing of certain guests.

In a room on the tenth floor, where the most expensive suites were located, stood a handsome young woman. She had been standing like a statue hewn out of marble for some time.

Suddenly a bell rang sharply through the brooding silence of the apartment. Its call was insistent.

Like one caught in the act of some mischief, she turned

and laid the framed picture of an unusually pretty child she had been holding, on the table.

Then she snatched it up again with an impetuous motion and gazed at it longingly. Her lips touched the cold glass.

"May God always keep you sweet and pure, my little darling," she murmured, her voice low and vibrant. "Some day you will be a woman. You will meet men——yes, many of them. I hope and pray that you may never know men as I have learned to know them to my bitter sorrow."

As she uttered these words a tear slipped from under her brown lashes and left a trail across the womanly beauty of her face. Another followed, then still another.

Her hand shook as she placed the picture on the mantel instead of on the table. In this position it was easier for her to study the finely chiseled features, so much like her own, on the picture. Her slim fingers followed the outline of the frame caressingly.

With her tear-dimmed eyes focused on those gazing so innocently into her own, she stood silent for a moment.

"Merciful God!" she began to pray fervently. "Grant that this dear child may never learn the truth. Grant this, oh Lord, for I would rather die than——!"

She paused abruptly and recoiled with a gasp of horror at her own reflection in the mirror.

There were lines about her mouth and a deadly pallor on her cheeks. Her wonderful wealth of brown hair was disheveled and clung to her throbbing temples.

Retribution was on its way!

The bell rang again, but she did not seem to hear it. With a low moan she sank into a chair before the open grate and stared into space. A timid knock on the door went unheard.

It was repeated twice—three times.

"Mrs. Baxter!" a voice called. "Mrs. Baxter!"

The woman in the chair lurched forward.

Her hands were closing and opening spasmodically as if it cost her a physical effort to regain command over her mental faculties. Rising slowly, she tottered toward the door and opened it with the deliberate motion of one in the sway of indecision. She stood face to face with a neatly dressed French maid.

"Good morning, Mrs. Baxter," greeted the girl, whose voice betrayed fright.

"What is it, Anna?" the woman whispered.

"Breakfast is ready and Mr. Baxter is waiting," came back. The maid stole a searching glance at her mistress, then lowered her voice and added: "He has asked for you several times and seems to be angry about something."

"Very well, Anna. Any mail for me?"

"One letter, Mrs. Baxter."

"Where from?" the latter inquired eagerly.

"I think it is from New York," said the maid.

The woman's eyes lit up with hope. "Did—did Mr. Baxter see it?"

A guilty flush crept into the maid's cheek

"I—I don't think so, unless—unless——," Her stammering was cut short.

"You are deliberately disregarding my instructions!" the woman exclaimed angrily. "I have told you repeatedly to bring all mail addressed to my name to me at once.

"Now go and get that letter. Tell Mr. Baxter not to wait for me. Tell him I am suffering with a severe headache."

The words were uttered in no pleasant manner. There was a sting in them which seemed to arouse resentment in the maid.

Her attitude changed and she drew herself up.

She shot her mistress a swift glance. As their eyes met for a few seconds, an expression of almost open hostility darkened hers. They narrowed to mere slits and a disdainful smile shot across her pretty face.

"Very well, Mrs. Baxter," she said in a tone that was far from being agreeable. "I'll get the letter right away." There was a slight pause, then she repeated somewhat sarcastically: "Mrs. Baxter."

A wave of color suffused the other woman's cheeks. She straightened up. But before she could speak, the maid had closed the door behind her and was gone.

"The impudence of that girl," she murmured to herself. "I wonder if she suspects that I am not——" She did not finish the sentence and stood there hanging her head.

As the maid hurried through several rooms she ran right into the arms of a man. She made no outcry nor did she struggle to free herself when he held her close and kissed her repeatedly.

"Oh, Mr. Baxter," she whispered as she lay passively on his bosom. "You——you frightened me."

"Did I?" The man uttered a low laugh. "Well, that is your punishment for almost bowling me over. You seem to be all excited. What's the trouble, Anna? Another row with——"

"She wants that letter," the maid broke in quickly. "Please let me go—now."

"Ah, I see." He released the girl reluctantly. "Well, you'll find it on the table in the dining room. And tell your mistress that I am tired of waiting. I'll have breakfast alone."

The girl nodded and smiled coquettishly.

"You might as well," she said. "Her ladyship told me to tell you that she has a headache. But I think it is another case of hysterics. She flew into a rage because I did not bring her the letter the moment the mail carrier left it."

"Don't you let that worry you," the man grinned. "Come, give me another kiss. You look mighty tempting this morning, little sweetheart."

"Not now." The girl made a quick motion with her hand, then ran on.

While this scene was being enacted, the woman waiting alone in the luxuriously furnished boudoir paced the floor impatiently. Twice she stopped, then approached the door and listened.

As the moments dragged on, her impatience grew.

"I wonder what is keeping that girl," she muttered, her lips twitching. "I do not trust her anymore than I do him. Oh, if I knew——" She stopped, her hands clenched. "God, what a horrible predicament to be in. I must make an end of it. Death is preferable to this sort of an existence."

Something seemed to be choking her. She clutched at her throat, staggered slightly and leaned against the wall.

Presently the maid opened the door and entered with the letter. She held it out to her mistress.

"Here it is, Mrs. Baxter," she said, a marked change in her

tone and manner. "I am sorry I forgot your instructions. I promise you it won't happen again. Please forgive me this time."

There was no reply to this. None was needed apparently,

The memory of all those things he had tried to forget came back with renewed bitterness.

The woman waited calmly until the maid had made her exit, then closed the door after her and locked it.

Going over to the table, she turned on the light, then resumed

the chair. For a few moments she stared at the letter, wondering what kind of a message it might contain.

She hesitated almost in fear. Finally she ripped the envelope open swiftly, drew out a neatly folded sheet of paper, and began to read slowly.

At the first words a spasm of suffering twisted her lips.

It was instantly replaced by the stony look of one who longs to weep and has no more tears left to shed. The shadows of the past rose up before her like ghosts that mocked her cruelly.

The letter was from an old friend, the only connecting link between the utterly hopeless presence and a happy past. Mrs. Randolph had always kept her informed.

"I saw your husband yesterday," it said. "I met him quite accidentally on Times Square. He seemed older by twenty years, and appeared to be very much worried about little Dorothy. He told me that the child had been seriously ill the last few days. I can not tell you how sorry I felt for him."

The woman crushed the letter to her bosom. Her mental agony was too great for words.

"My baby—my baby!" she wailed over and over again. "Oh, I would gladly give my life to be with you now. But it is useless to even think about that. He would never forgive me for what I did in my madness, and he would not tolerate me near you now. That is my punishment."

It was some time before she was able to compose herself sufficiently to finish reading the letter.

"Your husband is still living at the old place on Riverside Drive," it went on. "The newspapers say that he has been enormously successful in Wall Street lately. What a fool you were to leave him.

"I can not understand why he constantly refuses to divorce you, although every one knows he has quite sufficient cause. But I don't want to be mean and catty, Helen.

"I hope you are very happy with Henry Baxter. I dare say he is rich enough to——"

The woman could read no more. The malice contained in the last two sentences stung her to the quick.

With swift convulsive motions she tore the letter into small bits and threw them on the floor.

"Oh, how could she tell me anything like that!" she gasped, two bright red spots splashed on her cheeks. "It was mean. It was contemptible. I never harmed her in any way."

For a long time she sat there with her eyes half closed. Sob after sob came from her feverish lips. Her punishment had come. She was being paid in full for her midsummer-night madness. Again the specters of the past danced before her eyes.

She saw them in all their ugly vividness and shuddered.

It was the old, old story of a beautiful, pleasure-loving young wife neglected, a husband piling up millions to satisfy his ambition to be a leader in the financial world, and another man, the husband's best friend—the old, old story of the Eternal Triangle.

## CHAPTER 2

# *THE MAN*

THE marriage of Helen McRae and Richard Morton was an event long to be remembered. It was a brilliant social affair, and a real love match. Miss McRae had refused several of the richest men in Gotham for a man of moderate means, whose honorable name, a fine unblemished character, and indomitable will to conquer, were his chief assets.

Obviously they were the handsomest couple ever joined in wedlock at the fashionable old Trinity Church.

All the guests agreed that their marriage would be a wonderful success, with the exception of one whose cynical smile was unpleasant to see.

Henry Baxter could not reconcile himself to the fact that his persistent efforts to win the beautiful Helen had met with signal failure. He was not used to that sort of thing.

His unlimited wealth had always brought him the things he desired. Where his subtle flattery failed, his millions paved the way. And he was also a man who never forgave a slight.

His pride had been wounded to the core, and no one had ever injured him without paying the penalty.

So far as the lovely young Mrs. Morton was concerned, Baxter was merely biding his time. His turn to even the score was coming.

And it did!

A few New York newspapers printed the sordid details which led to the elopement. For a few weeks gossips were busy, then more sensational bits of scandal were sought elsewhere.

No one gave the slightest thought to the lives irretrievably

wrecked. That is not the way of big cities.

The one least concerned about the entire nasty affair was Henry Baxter. He got even with Morton and more than even with Morton's wife.

As he sat at the breakfast table this morning, a scented cigarette between his lips, an unpleasant smile clung persistently to his dark face. Unfolded before him was the Chicago Tribune, which printed a lengthy account of a financial transaction involving millions.

Several New York capitalists were interested and their names were given.

"I don't see Morton's name," he said half aloud, then chuckled. "He was in on that deal. I suppose Chicago is not so attractive just now. Well, I am sorry he did not come. I would like to have given him a chance to take his wife back."

He leaned back comfortably, then allowed his thoughts to wander back over the eventful months.

Suddenly the door opened and the chief object of his thoughts entered in an apparent hurry.

"Hello, Helen," he greeted, regarding her with some curiosity. "Headache better?"

She did not answer and took a seat opposite him at the table. Her silence was fraught with meaning.

Baxter shifted uneasily in his chair. He did not like the expression in her eyes, and the prolonged silence played havoc with his nerves.

"What is the matter?" he demanded. "Was there something in that letter which disturbed you?"

She gave him a swift, hostile glance.

"I am going to New York, Henry," she said.

"Well, that is interesting," he drawled. "How soon do you expect to leave?"

A look of bitter disappointment crept into her face. She had not expected him to say that. Yet she knew that he had grown tired of her.

"I——I believe you are glad I am going," she breathed. "Is that true?"

Again he regarded her in silence for some time. Finally he

said to her with cool deliberation:

"To be quite frank with you, yes."

"Oh, you beast!" Her eyes flashed as she repeated her words: "Oh, you beast!"

His laugh was ugly.

"You and I are not suited to each other, my dear girl," he went on mercilessly. "That became evident during the first month of our stay here. We both have tried to make the best of a bad bargain. Isn't that true, Helen? Let us be honest about it."

She shook her head slowly. She was not yet ready to admit her failure to live up to her promises as he had done. She had given him no cause for complaint.

"I have always played fair with you," she told him, her voice atremble. "If I have changed it is because of your neglect. You forgot all of your fine promises as soon as we came to Chicago.

"Night after night you left me alone until I could stand this solitude no longer. But I'll be honest and frank with you. There is another reason why I must go back to New York. It has nothing to do with you."

"What is that, Helen?" he grinned.

"Mrs. Randolph writes that Dorothy is ill. I—"

"Ah, I see," he interrupted.

Just then the telephone rang and he rose to answer. Helen, pale and haggard, watched him.

Henry Baxter was a man not easily confused, but it became evident as soon as he heard the voice at the other end of the line that he felt ill at ease.

"I can't discuss that matter now," he said, his voice pitched unusually high. "If the party for whom you are speaking insists on becoming troublesome, please tell her that I am in no way bound to respect her wishes. I want you to make this plain."

Helen leaned forward eagerly, her features tense. She knew that he was talking to a woman. He had given it away.

Her suspicions of several weeks were confirmed. She realized the ugly truth.

Baxter was wrought up. The manner in which he terminated the telephone conversation betrayed it. He returned to the table and fell into the chair.

"Who was that woman?" Helen asked.

"Oh, she claims to be the aunt of a movie actress I knew in New York," he admitted blandly. "The girl stopped over in Chicago on her way to Hollywood, California, where she has been engaged."

"A movie actress?" Helen stared at him. "What was she to you, Henry?"

"Nothing, my dear. Absolutely nothing."

"Don't lie to me!" Helen's wrath burst forth. "Don't you lie to me! What was she to you?"

"Well," Baxter shot back, "if you want to hear the details I'll oblige you. It is not a pleasant—"

"No!" She was on her feet and walked rapidly toward the door. Suddenly she turned and faced him, her anger gone. "This affair of ours has been a terrible mistake, Henry. You realize that, don't you? I gave up everything for you and you treated me shamefully. It was a horrible blunder."

Baxter inclined his head.

"Yes, I suppose it was," he said with an indifference which brought a wave of color to her face.

"Aren't you sorry, Henry?" she asked pitifully.

He had also risen and stood with his back to her. No reply was forthcoming.

"Aren't you sorry, Henry?" once more.

Still no answer.

Then the door opened swiftly and closed. When Baxter turned he found the woman gone.

He made no move to follow her. And nothing could have been farther from his mind than the thought of calling her back. He resumed his chair and lit another cigarette with slow deliberation. The sigh which escaped his lips was one of intense relief.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE HUSBAND

ON a little table, in the midst of a grim array of medicine bottles and boxes, dimly burned a night lamp—the chosen companion of illness and misery. In a big armchair, between the table and the bed, and within easy reach of both, sat a singularly handsome man of about twenty-six. It was his seventh night in the chair and he leaned his head back against the cushion in an attitude of utter exhaustion.

But the strong, clean-cut face, that for seven long days had been a mask of fear and suffering, was transfigured with joy and thanksgiving as he reached over every few minutes and touched the forehead of the little girl in bed.

There was moisture under the dark curls, and the fever had given way to the pallor of weakness.

Richard Morton had suffered untold mental agony during the past two months. His life, since the elopement of his wife with Baxter, was but an empty shell.

And in the last seven days the memory of all those things he had tried to forget, had come back with renewed bitterness.

He stirred as someone moved about in the hall outside.

Rose, the maid who had been in his house since his marriage, softly opened the door and whispered that Mrs. Randolph was in the library.

He rose with a sigh, and after another tender look at the sleeping child, tip-toed out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Mrs. Randolph, an old friend of the family, was an extremely good-looking young widow.

Her interest in Richard Morton had increased visibly during the past two months. She was a sister of Dr. Holmes, who had brought little Dorothy back from the brink of the grave.

It may also be added here that Dr. Holmes was a warm personal friend of Morton.

As he went slowly downstairs he made a determined effort to appear cheerful, and he looked a little more like his old self as he entered the library with one of his rare smiles.

"How kind of you to come," he said.

The young widow took his outstretched hand and held it longer than the occasion called for.

"I am delighted with the news Rose has just given me," she exclaimed. "She told me Dorothy had much improved."

"Yes," he responded wearily, "our little girl has passed the crisis, and I thank God for it. It has been a hard fight, but she won out against—"

"You have had a bad time of it, you poor boy," Mrs. Randolph interrupted with all the sympathy she could put into the words. "I rejoice with you."

He forced another smile and said:

"It hasn't been easy, I assure you. And I shall never be able to repay your brother for what he has done for me." His voice trembled as he added: "He is not only a very capable physician, but also a most loyal friend."

"What he has done is no more than any other physician would have done," she replied gently. "He is very fond of you and little Dorothy."

He looked at her quizzically.

"And you, dear Mrs. Randolph?"

She was astounded at the question. For a moment she did not know how to answer.

It was personal, and so far he had carefully refrained from allowing his conversations with her to drift into a channel which

approached the slightest degree of intimacy.

It was by no means an easy task to find words fitting for a reply. Richard Morton gazed at her steadily until she grew embarrassed.

"I—I love the child," she stammered, blushing in her confusion, "and I feel very sorry for you. I have tried my best to cheer you up a bit. I know how unhappy you must have been since Helen——"

His hand was raised swiftly in silent protest

"Please, don't mention her name. Please don't," he almost sobbed. "That is a closed and sealed book. If you have the least feeling of friendship for me, never mention her name again in my presence."

Mrs. Randolph averted her face. The smile on it was one of sinister satisfaction she must hide.

She was playing her cards carefully, and with the shrewdness of a woman who understood men. She knew how to detect their weaknesses.

Ever since the fateful elopement of Morton's wife, the fascinating widow had sought to reach his heart, and she was succeeding admirably. She had always loved him in secret.

She loved him dearly now.

But she was not playing the game square. She played both ends adroitly in a desperate effort to hasten a divorce.

And Richard Morton had not the faintest suspicion that this woman was in constant touch with his recreant wife. His faith in her as a loyal friend had not yet been shaken.

As she sat there, facing him now, her bland smile disarmed him.

He gave her a rather wistful smile in return and waited for her to speak.

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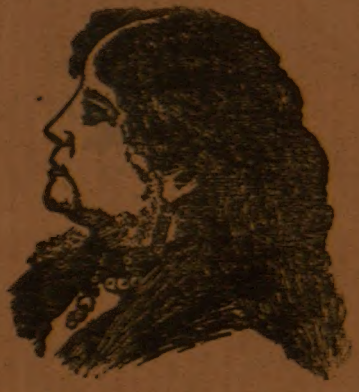

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